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ABSTRACT

This booklet describes the implementation of a Competency Based Teacher Education (CBTE) program at South Carolina State University. Students preparing to teach in elementary schools are involved in this program. CBTE is seen as a method for improving instruction and delivery of service to students, a method for increasing individualization of instruction, for establishing more consistency and predictability in delivery of instruction and learning expectations, and a method for keeping track of what the actual curriculum for the institution's elementary teacher education program is. The curriculum contains modules set up for curriculum, field experience, microteaching, and learning centers. The learning experience of the students over the past five years in which CBTE has been in effect has seemed to justify this method of teacher education. The university is in the process of refining and improving the program. (JD)

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A REVIEW AND EVALUATION OF THE CBTE PROGRAM AT SOUTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

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CBTE AT SOUTH CAROLINA

It is impressive to find a high quality CBTE program alive and well at South Carolina State. The Department of Education under the leadership of Dr. Alba Lewis has modified the elementary education teacher education program to include

(1) - modules

(2) - learning center activities

(3) - micro-teaching

(4) - early field experiences as observer and para-professional

(5) - competency checklists

What is most impressive is the communication and commitment of the students, the teachers, and the administrators. People talk to each other constantly about teaching and learning, about providing better learning opportunities for individual named students, about improving the quality of what happens in schools, and about finding more time, money, other professionals to help with the job. People try to find ways to help each other out, to help each other make a module, learning experience or field experience clearer, more interrelated, more significant. People spend time listening to each other to gain understanding and to improve ability to support each other. People know what is going on, who is doing what, what the problems are, what is happening next.

In a word, the group process among the members of the department is healthy and surviving well the stress and strain of rather intense program development. Asking course instructors to do what they can and setting quality and quantity criteria for modules which are realizable has reinforced the goodwill of the individual department members to make the CBTE components an integral part of their professional effort. The visible effort to produce and use modules has

been significantly enhanced by the ability of the personnel in the learning center to use the equipment, space, and technology to support and enhance the curriculum that is outlined in the modules. The ability of the persons responsible for micro-teaching clinics, pre-field experience, and field experience to structure these experiences to support the modules is also crucial. The serendipity of the administration providing specialized space, facilities and key personnel at the appropriate time has also been an encouraging and energizing factor.

As a result, the question in peoples' minds is not should we develop a CBTE program. The question is rather how do we develop modules, learning experiences and field experiences that work for our students and assure quality performance and achievement by our students that is comparable to any institution.

During this first phase of adoption of CBTE at South Carolina State, all of the components of a quality CBTE program have been installed. There are modules in all the key courses: methods, curriculum, and foundations. It is particularly significant that foundations courses are developing modules which include readings, films, and now some videotapes. This part is a clear indicator of commitment of all the department instructors to implementing CBTE.

Some concern is exhibited about the quality of competency statements, the relatedness of learning experiences to specific competencies, the relatedness of field experiences or micro-teaching experiences to competency statements, and the development of effective measurement instruments that indicate learning of competencies. These are all the right questions about the crucial linkages between a mechanism - CBTE and reality - the training of teachers. That the questions are being asked are indicators that the CBTE is more than an idea, that it is a process in search of a South Carolina State reincarnation. These questions are refinement questions

and indicate the readiness at South Carolina State to move to a new stage; to move from trying it out to making it fit. And this new stage requires new resources and new roles.

THE REFINEMENT STAGE

First of all, a decision needs to be made that CBTE at South Carolina is going to move from the awareness and testing out of concept stage to the refinement stage. The group should decide if yes is the answer to the following questions:

(a) Do we know what a module is?

(b) Do we know what competency statements are?

(c) Can we design learning experiences that develop the identified competencies?

(d) Can we identify practice and field experiences that develop and reinforce the identified competencies?

(e) Can we identify indicators in what the student does as a learner, does as a teacher and what the pupil does and/or the classroom setting looks like that demonstrate acquisition of the identified competencies.

(f) Do we want to arrange our course offerings, the modules, the learning center activities, the micro-teaching activities, the field experiences, and the practice teaching so that they complement and reinforce each other?

If the answer is yes, then the group should move to the refinement stage.

The objectives of the refinement stage would be:

(a) to develop field tested modules for all courses

(b) to include in all modules

(1) a list of competencies

(2) a list of learning experiences for each competency including:

- a list of experiences provided in courses
- a list of experiences provided at the learning center
- a list of experiences provided at the micro-teaching clinic
- a list of experiences provided in the field settings
- a list of experiences provided in the practice teaching

(3) the materials needed to support these experiences

(4) the evaluation checklist of indicators that document acquisition of competencies

(c) to document the process for refinement of modules, and learning center activities, and field experiences, and evaluation checklist.

While the activities required to implement the refinement stage are similar to those used for the trying out stage, some activities will require more energy. Specifically writing and documentation efforts and evaluation checklist development efforts will require more focus and energy. Course instructors will require assistance in the following areas:

(a) preparation and design of modules

(b) identification and monitoring of related field experiences

(c) identification and monitoring of micro-teaching experiences

(d) production and delivery of learning center activities

(e) documentation of development process

(f) development of evaluation checklist indicators.

South Carolina State presently has personnel with expertise allocated to areas (1), (2), (3), and (4) but not (5) and (6). Given the present commitments of existing staff, one would expect at least one person, a researcher/writer, to be

added to the staff to support the refinement effort. As the coordinator role is most effective when it is seen as and spends the most energy on the preparation and design of modules and keeping track of things, and the field experiences, practice teaching, and learning center personnel are most effective when working on developing, monitoring, and delivering these components, then the evaluation checklist and documentation effort requires an identified person focusing on that area. This key role should also be made clear and distinct as more modules are developed, not only in the basic courses for teacher education, but also in core curriculum, such as reading as well as related courses in other departments or other colleges. The coordinator role in particular will be stretched into assisting in the development of those new modules. Field experience, practice teaching experiences, and learning center activities will also increase and require more targeted effort by this staff. All of this argues for additional technical expertise and support.

Training and Analysis sessions will continue to be needed to clarify and reinforce the concept, the process, the products that are CBTE at South Carolina State for existing and new staff. More practical development activities will be required than theoretical discussion. The administration will need to commit department staff meeting time and workshop days to continue the development of modules, the clarification of relevant learning experiences, and the development of valid and reliable evaluation indicators. It would be helpful to indicate these training and analysis sessions in advance to distinguish them from the on-going support and development efforts provided by the department and the staff.

The refinement stage should be expected to produce at least the following:

(a) the basic South Carolina State Modules

- Methods modules
- Curriculum modules
- Foundations modules
- Field Experience modules
- Micro-teaching modules
- Learning Center modules

(b) some Content Area modules

(c) some Special Support modules

(d) the South Carolina Evaluation Indicators Checklist

(e) the documentation of development processes

(f) a research report on student performance and learning achievement.

Clearly this new stage will take more than one year, just as the trying out stage took more than one year. Everyone should understand this as they start down a path that leads to clearer and more distinctive quality products that serve the special learner that comes to South Carolina State.

AN OUTSIDER'S VIEW

There are some who would focus this report on the quality of the language used in the modules to define competencies and describe learning experiences and measure achievement. This report presents another perspective; not that quality of modules is not an important evaluation question. Rather, the key question in the eyes of this observer is can a system for curriculum improvement actually be implemented in a place like South Carolina State. The student population is not highly selective, the instructors carry many roles and responsibilities, the work loads are extreme, the support staff minimal, the facilities adequate, the field sites

adequate. What helps make things better seems a more crucial discovery than what the best looks like.

CBTE has had an impact at South Carolina State not because it was seen as the cure-all, but because it is seen as a method for improving instruction and delivery of service to students, a method for increasing individualization of instruction, for establishing more consistency and predictability in delivery of instruction and learning expectations, and a method for keeping track of what the actual curriculum for the South Carolina State elementary teacher education program is. And for those purposes, the CBTE effort is doing very well indeed. Students know where they are, what will happen to them, what is expected of them. Instructors know what they want to do, for what purpose, and with what materials and technical support: films, video-tapes, publications. The administration knows what personnel, facilities, arrangements are needed to improve instruction. Negotiating dollars and personnel to fill these gaps is not always successful, but the targets are clear.

South Carolina State took a large step into the unknown when the department decided to implement CBTE. Today, five years later, the professional risk involved in that decision has narrowed due to the significant effort at South Carolina State to implement CBTE that works. The professional stance of South Carolina State to improve instruction in teacher education systematically can be documented and collecting evidence of the effect on student teachers can now be addressed. The challenge the department faces now is to share with the profession the growth and effect of a significant event in teacher education. The South Carolina State Department of Education has demonstrated that CBTE can work in a small developing institution.